

BILLY JIM LAYTON:
String Quartet in Two Movements
Claremont String Quartet
Marc Gottlieb, violin
Vladimir Weisman, violin
William Schoen, viola
Irving Klein, cello

ABOUT the *String Quartet in Two Movements*, composer Billy Jim Layton has this to say: "The quartet was written during 1955 and early 1956 while I was at the American Academy in Rome as a Rome Prize Fellow. It is a composition to which I devoted a great deal of thought and effort and, as I look back on it, it seems to me that it represents a kind of summation of my artistic development and convictions up to that point. In it my aim was to achieve the widest range of expression possible without lapsing into incoherence, by always maintaining the strongest formal control."

The thought and effort expended by Layton on this work has resulted in a Quartet which holds qualities of extraversion and introversion in an unusual balance, with areas of high emotional tension and vigor being set off against other statements of the utmost passivity and inwardness, sometimes almost expressionist in esthetic. A highly complex treatment of rhythmic resources is always in evidence, whether the music flows along with an ethereal line singing above a lightly punctuated counterpoint, or steps out in jazzy, muscular syncops. Indeed, rhythm would seem to be the real heart of this Quartet. In more than one section, it constitutes the entire subject under discussion. Instrumental color, however, is another string preoccupation of the composer. The resources of his medium are constantly exploited to the full, bringing into combination writing *con sordino* and *senza sordino*; *non vibrato* and *molto vibrato*; *col legno* plus high and low *pizzicato*. There are even trills beginning as whole-step intervals and gradually contracting to quarter-tones. Every measure of the score bespeaks meticulous handling of all materials; a high consciousness of the potency of timbre, and a delight in its manipulation.

about the composer:

Billy Jim Layton was born in Corsicana, Texas, in 1924. He studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Yale University, and Harvard. Several scholarships and prizes were awarded him by these institutions. He has also held the Hertz Travelling Fellowship from the University of California and the Rome Prize, 1954-57. In 1958, a grant "in recognition of creative work in music" was awarded him by the National Institute of Arts and Letters, in connection with which the present recording is issued. He has received several important commissions, including one by the Koussevitsky Foundation. Performances of his music for solo, chamber, orchestral, and choral combinations have been given in many cities of the United States and Europe.

ROBERT MOEVS:
Sonata per Pianoforte
Joseph Bloch, piano

THOUGH the *Sonata per Pianoforte* by Robert Moevs is not strictly-speaking a "neo-classic" work, if one defines the term narrowly as meaning only the style of certain works by Stravinsky which are patterned on models from earlier periods, or in which deliberate quoted references are made to music of those periods, it nevertheless bears a strong esthetic relationship to such music.

This can be noted, first of all, in the extreme cleanliness of its textures, and in the carefulness with which almost every note in the tonal fabric is considered.

The opening *Preludio* comprises, throughout its length, a searching examination of a repeated-note figure juxtaposed against a chordal counterpoint, in which minute changes of harmony and register, or rhythmic displacements of the basic idea, are made the center of attention. *Aria*, the second movement, begins with a delicately framed cantilena, then develops a middle section whose violence takes it far away from the “neo-classic” restraint which preceded and which is to follow. The third movement, *Canone*, embodies *leggiero* writing, constantly fast-moving and brilliant, again carefully poised and delicate, as is true of neo-classicism. And the final movement, *Rondo*, while reaching toward far greater dynamic heights and occasionally employing a bravura style of expression, yet holds for the most part to a preference for fineness of line, cool brilliance, and transparency. In sum, then, while Moevs’ *Sonata per Pianoforte* is not the product of complete dedication to the neo-classic way of thinking, the composer has adopted certain of that manner’s best traits and employed them to advantage in speaking his own mind. Since clarity is a prime neo-classic trait, it goes without saying that there is never any doubt what Moevs is saying. It is always right there before the ear.

about the composer:

Robert Moevs was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1920. He was graduated from Harvard College in 1942, and pursued his musical education in Paris at the Conservatoire, with Nadia Boulanger. In 1952 he was awarded the Prix de Rome, and when he returned to this country was appointed instructor in music at Harvard. His compositions include works for orchestra: *Endymion*, a ballet, *Introduction and Fugue*, *Overture*, *Fourteen Variations* (performed by Koussevitsky), and *Three Symphonic Pieces*; for chamber groups: *Duo for Oboe and English Horn*; *Spring*, for trumpet and four violins; for voice: *The Bacchantes* (mixed chorus), *Youthful Song* (solo and piano), and the *Cantata Sacra*.

Notes by Lester Trimble

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY and its parent organization, The National Institute of Arts and Letters, are honorary societies with a distinguished membership of creative artists. They are chartered by act of Congress, and devoted to the furtherance of the arts in the United States.

Through joint committees of selection, these societies every year award fifteen grants of one thousand dollars each to young artists in recognition of distinction and promise. Three of these grants go annually to composers.

In the spring, an exhibition of the works of award winners in painting and sculpture is held at the Academy building. Now it has been decided to inaugurate a series with the similar purpose of calling attention to the works of award winners in music.

This release, presented with the collaboration of Composers Recordings, Inc., introduces to the public works by Billy Jim Layton and Robert Moevs, 1958 award winners.

—DOUGLAS MOORE

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

